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DETAILED REPORT ON PAGE 14

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METRO RAIL FINALLY UNLOCKED

Metro rail will be allowed to operate from Sept 7 in a graded manner, the Union Home Ministry said as part of its Unlock 4.0 prescriptions. A look at the other takeaways

THUMBS UP TO MASS EVENTS

Social/academic/sports/entertainment/cultural/religious/political functions and other congregations will be permitted with a ceiling of 100 people from Sept 21. Open air theatres can function from that day

RESTRICTED ACTIVITY IN SCHOOLS

While schools, colleges, educational and coaching institutions will continue to remain closed till September-end, the following will be allowed:

1. States may permit up to 50% of teaching and non-teaching staff to be called to schools at a time for online teaching/tele-counselling and related work
2. Students of Classes 9 to 12 may be permitted to visit schools if they are outside Containment Zones on a voluntary basis for taking guidance from teachers, subject to written consent of parents/guardians
3. Skill or entrepreneurship training permitted in National Skill Training Institutes, ITIs, etc

HIGHER EDUCATION SCENE

In higher education institutions, only for PhD scholars and PG students of technical and professional programmes requiring laboratory/experimental works can be permitted depending on case load in states and other factors

LOCKDOWN BAR ON STATES

State/UT governments shall not impose any local lockdown (state/district/sub-division/city/village level), outside containment zones, without prior consultation with Centre

Guest cap raised

Till Sept 20, marriage functions with guests up to 50 and funeral/last rites gathering up to 20 people to stay; cap to be raised to 100 after that

What hasn't changed

Cinema halls, swimming pools, entertainment parks, theatres (excluding open air theatre) can't be opened. Also, no international air travel of passengers

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PLOY UNCOVERED

Border Security Force personnel at the site in J&K's Samba district where a major underground tunnel, originating in Pakistan, was detected • PTI | P10

China in mind, India opts out of multinational wargames in Russia

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

IN a last-minute decision, India on Saturday withdrew its contingent from a multinational military exercise, slated to be held in Russia in mid-September, because of Chinese and Pakistani participation.

A senior officer confirmed, "We have withdrawn from the Kavkaz 2020 strategic command post exercise, scheduled to be held in Astrakhan region, Russia, from September 15 to 26."

Given the ongoing Sino-Indian stand-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh, New Delhi was reluctant to participate in a joint exercise with the Chinese and Pakistani troops, the source said.

For the record, the government attributed its decision to the pandemic and logistics. "In view of pandemic and consequent difficulties in exercise, including arrangements of logistics, India has decided not to send a contingent this year to Kavkaz-2020," the Defence Ministry said.

The decision came a week after India had confirmed the participation of its tri-services contingent of 178 troops — 140 from the Army, 36 of the Air Force and two from the Navy. The Army had planned to send troops of the Dogra Regiment, the Special Forces, Armoured, Mechanised, Artillery, Signals, Engineers and Army Air Defence.

In all, 12,500 troops from 18 countries, including Iran, Turkey, Syria, the Central Asian nations and all other SCO members are expected to participate in the wargames. China will send three naval frigates as well.

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CR&M 3554

Centre looks to sweeten deal as oppn peaks

Govt issues clarification on GST dues, promises to keep borrowing cost low

ANURADHA SHUKLA @ New Delhi

EVEN as a clutch of states, including Kerala, Maharashtra and Punjab, rejected the Centre's twin borrowing options to meet states' revenue shortfall, the Union Finance Ministry on Saturday sought to hardsell its idea saying the Centre will ensure the cost remains affordable.

Promising to keep the cost not higher than the G-sec yield, the Finance Ministry offered to pay the difference if the cost inches up. It will bear the margin between G-secs and average of State Development Loan yields up to 0.5% through a subsidy, the ministry said.

However, the devil is in the detail. States planning to fix the entire revenue shortfall (due to GST implementation and pandemic) will have to borrow from the open market and bear the cost of interest.

On Saturday, the Finance Ministry wrote to all states and Union Territories clarifying that the special borrowing window will be available only for filling the GST shortfall. States that go for full borrowing will have to pay interest from their own resources, it added.

In the GST Council meeting on August 27, the ministry had estimated this year's GST shortfall at ₹3 lakh crore — ₹97,000 crore due to GST implementation and the rest because of the Covid-19 pandemic. With cess collection pegged at ₹65,000 crore, states may stare at a ₹2.35 lakh crore gap. The Centre listed out two options — borrow the entire shortfall or fill only the GST-induced shortfall.

The Finance Ministry also clarified that the Centre will pay the principal and interest on the borrowed amount from the compensation cess only if states opt for the first option.

In the second option, the Centre will only take care of the principal amount; states will have to bear the interest cost. It also said the borrowing programme has sufficient legislative backing.

How the two options will work

OPTION 1

FinMin will allow a special window for states to borrow shortfall in revenues due to GST implementation (₹97,000 cr)

Centre will ensure borrowing cost is not above the G-sec yield; if cost is higher, Centre will pay for the difference through a subsidy

States can repay the entire borrowing from Compensation Cess proceeds; They won't have to depend on any other source

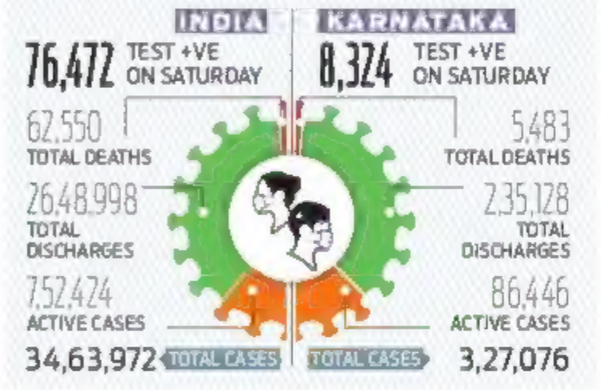
OPTION 2

States can borrow the entire revenue shortfall of ₹2,35,000 crore (due to GST implementation plus Covid-impact) through the issue of market debt

States are supposed to pay interest from their own resources, but the principal can be paid from proceeds of the Cess

The borrowing will not be treated as debt to the extent of the shortfall (₹97,000 crore)

COVID-19 BATTLE



Covid-19 spreading to Karnataka's towns, villages. And fast!

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Bengaluru

AS Karnataka crossed the three-lakh mark in Covid-19 tally — a huge jump from 1.29 lakh positive cases in the beginning of the month — the virus seems to be spreading fast in small towns and villages. On Saturday, the state reported 8,324 new cases, taking the total to 32,7076.

Free movement of people after the easing of lockdown restrictions, reverse migration and increase in the number of tests have been attributed to the significant increase in cases in places like Shikaripura and Bhadravathi taluks in Shivamogga district, which saw a big jump and reported over 1,000 cases in August.

"People in villages, specially farmers, depend on Shivamogga city for purchase of seeds, fertilisers and equipment. When they visit crowded areas, they get infected and take back the virus to their villages. Tracing such people is a challenging task," Shivamogga District Health Officer Dr Rajesh Suragihalli told *The New Sunday Express*.

Dr C S Patil, Chief Medical Officer, Athani Government Hospital, Belagavi district, concurs. "Large sections of the population in most taluks and villages depend on nearby cities for business and marketing. As a result, frequent shuttling of the rural population between cities and villages has led to a rapid spread of Covid-19 into rural pockets," he said.

In Shivamogga district, total number of cases on August 1 was 1,842 which jumped to 7,848 in the last 29 days. During the same period, the number in Belagavi district increased to 11,719 from 3,449. The rise in positive cases was equally drastic in Yadgir — from 2,386 to 5,205; in Kolar from 1,364 to 3,320 and in Gadag from 1,480 to 4,976. P4

Phase 2 vaccine trials start in Mysuru hospital

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Mysuru

THE second phase trials for the Oxford-AstraZeneca-Serum Institute Covishield, claimed to be the most promising vaccine so far against the Novel Coronavirus, started at the JSS Hospital in Mysuru on Saturday, with five volunteers receiving the candidate vaccine shots.

The second phase is being carried out on healthy persons with priority being the safety of those who are administered the Covishield vaccine to record the reactions, allergies and also to take note of the beneficial effects. As part of the nationwide programme, the JSS Hospital in Mysuru is one among the 17 sites in India chosen by ICMR and Serum Institute of India for the trials. The ICMR will collect 100 samples from across the country for further study and look into modifications. The five who were administered the candidate vaccine will be under observation till September 29, after which it will be tried on more people. P6

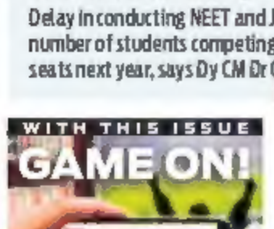
About 150 countries are experimenting on vaccines for Covid-19. We will have some vaccine by December

— Dr B Suresh Pro-Chancellor, JSS Academy of Higher Education & Research

INTERVIEW

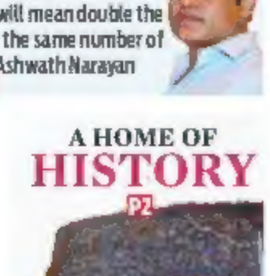
WE HAVE K-CET MODEL

Delay in conducting NEET and JEE will mean double the number of students competing for the same number of seats next year, says Dy CM Dr C N Ashwath Narayan P3



PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

A HOME OF HISTORY P2



APPEAL TO PM

Save us from virus 'hangover': Wine merchants

BALA CHAUHAN @Bengaluru

WITH the fizz gone out of their business, the wine merchants, who have been urging the State government to allow them to reopen bars and restaurants, have now reached out to the Prime Minister.

Taking cognizance of the letter sent to the Prime Minister by the Federation of the Wine Merchants Association (FWMA), Karnataka, requesting him to allow the reopening of bars and restaurants "in entirety" in the State as was prior to the Lockdown-1, the Prime Minister's Office has directed Karnataka to respond to the wine merchants association's demand.

The PMO has written to the Chief Secretary to respond to the petitioner (Govindraj Hegde, principal secretary, FWMA) and upload the copy on the portal. The association has brought to the notice of the PMO that the Karnataka government has allowed sale of Indian Made Liquor (IML) but has not yet given permission for serving food along with IML in restaurants attached to the bar.

"In Karnataka, customers come to restobars and order for IML or beer along with food. This should be allowed in entirety as was before the lockdown, which was imposed on March 24," the FWMA letter stated.

The association has also drawn its notice regarding the change in business timings of liquor outlets in the State after they were re-opened in May.

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